

On CT H.B. No. 5029

Hello, my name Matt Breuer, and I'm an undergraduate at Yale University, where I've been doing sexual assault prevention work for the past two years.

I've driven up here today because I believe deeply in the work that we are doing at Yale to combat sexual violence, and I am incredibly encouraged by the students at other schools who are demanding that the environment change on their college campuses.

However, in my experience doing this work over the past two years at Yale, I have become increasingly convinced that top-down enforcement cannot provide us with the type of change that will actually prevent sexual violence on our campus.

Make no mistake: it is absolutely essential that our universities have transparent disciplinary processes, that survivors are both supported and relentlessly advocated for, and that those who commit violence against our communities are met with appropriate, serious punishment.

However, enforcement cannot be our only response to sexual violence. We cannot pretend that the same solutions of deterrence that have failed us in our effort to combat drugs are suddenly going to be solutions to deeper, cultural problems. Moreover, if we let our conversation turn to enforcement, we too quickly fall into the traps of racism, classism, and sexism. We know that stereotypes of assailants capture a small sliver of the problem, and create far more problems than they solve.

If we are going to make our campuses safer for all students, our focus can't rest solely on what happens after an assault has occurred. Our priority must be prevention. In my experience as a peer educator at Yale, I've watched the conversations among my peers improve year by year. We haven't done it by continually putting the definition of consent in students' faces, or by reminding them of the punishments that await those who violate our community's trust. We are beginning to make that change because we've asked students "what do you want this campus to look like?" and begun to reshape our campus towards those ideals.

It is hard work changing campus culture, and it's work that is unlikely to be done by prescriptive requirements or mandated penalties – what universities need are real resources to support the work they are currently doing, and better access to the strategies that *are* seeing results for Connecticut students. I genuinely believe we can make real progress together as a state, but we aren't going to do it if our focus is in the wrong place.